

Dmitry Firtash: The Oligarch at the Center of the Ukraine Scandal

[Dmitry Firtash](#), sometimes spelled Dmytro, is a Ukrainian natural gas billionaire who is linked to numerous individuals who have been caught up in the Ukraine impeachment scandal, including Rudy Giuliani associates Lev Parnas and Igor Fruman. He also recently hired two lawyers close to President Donald Trump in an apparent attempt to curry favor with him as Firtash fights extradition to the United States.

Overview:

- The Department of Justice (DOJ) [described](#) Firtash as an “upper-echelon [associate] of Russian organized crime.” The State Department [has linked](#) him to notorious Russian mob boss Serhiy Mogilevich (sometimes spelled Semyon).
- Firtash was [indicted](#) in the United States in 2013 on charges related to bribery. Since being arrested in Austria in 2014, he has been living in Vienna and fighting extradition to the United States.
- Firtash is [reportedly](#) linked to Trump lawyer Rudy Giuliani’s campaign to dig up dirt in Ukraine on Trump’s political opponent. As he continues to battle extradition to the United States, Firtash appears to be using his connections to curry favor with the Trump administration.
- Firtash has [firmly denied](#) all allegations of wrongdoing and has not been found guilty of any crimes.

Beginning in 2004, Firtash [began rising](#) to prominence as a Ukrainian natural gas mogul, building connections to both the Russian and Ukrainian governments and allegedly to the Russian mob. Firtash made billions of dollars essentially acting as an intermediary in the natural gas industry between the Russian and Ukrainian governments. Through a deal with the Kremlin, Firtash was able to buy discounted gas from Russia and sell it to Ukraine. This made him both incredibly wealthy and a powerful figure, until the Ukrainian prime minister at the time, Yulia Tymoshenko, prioritized renegotiating with Russia, and Firtash [was cut out](#).

2004-2009: Firtash reportedly used proceeds from a lucrative natural gas deal to [support](#) the corrupt Ukrainian politician Viktor Yanukovich.

- Through [RosUkrEnergo](#) (RUE), a partnership between the Russian state-owned Gazprom and Firtash’s holding company, Firtash [bought](#) discounted gas in Russia from Gazprom and [resold](#) it to the Ukrainian state-owned Naftogaz.
- This deal [demonstrates](#) that Firtash had close ties to the Russian government and that he leveraged that relationship for personal profit, though he has never made any such claim.
- Firtash also developed alleged connections to Russian organized crime around this time—what he has strongly denied—including [alleged connections](#) to Russian mob boss Mogilevich, with whom the [company](#) denied.
 - Mogilevich may have been linked to the natural gas industry before Firtash’s involvement. Prior to RUE’s formation, the natural gas middleman between Russia and Ukraine had been a [company](#) “alleged to have links” to Mogilevich.

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- o [According](#) to a 2008 State Department cable written by then-U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine William Taylor and later leaked by WikiLeaks, Taylor and [Firtash](#) had a [meet](#) where Firtash “acknowledged ties to Russian organised crime figure Semyon Mogilevich stating he had needed Mogilevich's approval to get into business in the first place.”
- o Mogilevich has [denied](#) all allegations [above](#), [including](#) those of involvement in organ crime “or any connection to the gas trade in Ukraine.” [Firtash](#) has [denied links](#) to Mogilevich and the Russian mob.

2008-2011: Firtash was cut out of the natural gas deal and reportedly considered going into business with Paul Manafort.

- In early 2009, then-Ukrainian [Prime Minister](#) Yulia Tymoshenko struck her own natural gas deal with Russian President Vladimir Putin. The complex and controversial [maneuver](#) [essentially](#) cut out [Firtash](#) as the middleman, “depriving Firtash of significant profits.”
- Around this same time, Firtash allegedly began his business relationship with the man who would one day be in charge of Trump’s presidential campaign: Paul Manafort. Firtash and Manafort [reportedly](#) considered [collaborating](#) on an [\\$850 million](#) real estate deal involving the Drake Hotel in New York that [ultimately fell through](#).
 - o Firtash [denies](#) ever having any business ties with Manafort and denies ever putting a dollar of money into the Drake deal.
- Prime Minister Tymoshenko decided to run for president against Viktor Yanukovich in the 2010 election. Firtash [had backed](#) Yanukovich for [years](#) and [sought](#) to help him win against Tymoshenko. These efforts included backing Paul Manafort, who had already been working as an image consultant to Yanukovich, to run Yanukovich’s campaign.
- After Yanukovich won the election, Firtash became a close ally to the new president, and his business thrived. Firtash also continued to support [Yanukovich](#), [including](#) by purchasing a television station in an apparent effort to help Yanukovich politically.
- Less than one year after Yanukovich won, Tymoshenko was [imprisoned](#) over the renegotiated [gas deal](#), in what multiple U.S. lawmakers [observed](#) to be a politically motivated [case](#). There was no indication that Firtash had an involvement in the case against Tymoshenko.
- Tymoshenko sued Firtash and Manafort in the United States, claiming that their planned Drake Hotel real estate [project](#) was part of a money laundering [operation](#) and [alleging](#) that Firtash used the money to “[support] pro-Russian politicians in Ukraine.” Manafort and Firtash denied all wrongdoing, and the case was [ultimately dismissed](#).

Starting in 2013, Firtash’s fortunes shifted as he ran into serious legal and political troubles. He was indicted in the United States and subsequently began fighting extradition to the United States with the help of wealthy, Kremlin-connected Russians. Around the same time, the Maidan revolution overthrew Ukrainian President Yanukovich, whom Firtash had backed for years, and the new government in Ukraine proved far less friendly toward Firtash.

2013-2014: Firtash was indicted in the United States and arrested in Austria.

- Firtash was indicted in Illinois on federal racketeering charges, unrelated to the 2011 Tymoshenko lawsuit. Prosecutors argued that [Firtash bribed](#) Indian government officials \$1 million to help him mine titanium to sell to Boeing and that [some](#) of these [bribes](#) went through U.S. banks. Firtash [has denied](#) these [charges](#) in [court](#) and in the [media](#).

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- In 2014, the DOJ [unsealed](#) the indictment and [Firtash](#) was [arrested](#) in Vienna.
- He posted bail with the [assistance](#) of Russian billionaire Vasily Anisimov, who is business partners with close Putin ally Arkady Rotenberg.
 - Firtash has longtime ties to Rotenberg and his brother Boris, as they had reportedly [attended](#) the same judo club in the 1960s.

December 2015: Firtash tried to return to Ukraine, but the new post-Yanukovich government wanted to keep him out.

- Firtash had planned to return to Ukraine from Vienna. Due to his close ties to ousted former President Yanukovich, however, the new post-Maidan Ukrainian government [made it clear](#) Firtash was not welcome back and that he would be arrested upon return.
- That same month, then-Vice President Joe Biden gave a speech to the Ukrainian parliament where he criticized oligarchs.
 - Firtash has brought this speech [up in an interview](#) with the Daily Beast, calling Biden's speech "horrible."
 - [According](#) to the Daily Beast, gas reforms advocated for by the U.S. government may have cost Firtash "hundreds of millions of dollars."

February 2017: Firtash ran into legal trouble in Spain.

- In February 2017, Austria cleared Firtash for extradition to the United States, but he was immediately [rearrested](#) on a Spanish [warrant alleging](#) that Firtash was involved in a scheme to launder around 10 million euros "through property deals and restaurants" using funds "from companies incorporated in Cyprus and the British Virgin Islands."
 - These money laundering charges have been linked to [activity in Catalonia](#). A 2018 Senate Foreign Relations Committee [minority report](#) noted that "Russia-based criminal organizations have reportedly been active in Catalonia for years," alluding to "long-running efforts by Russian organized crime groups to set up shop in Catalonia."
 - Austria [rejected](#) Spain's request for extradition. [Firtash](#) has [denied](#) all Spanish charges and any involvement in the activities detailed above.

As Trump sought dirt on Biden, Firtash sought to curry favor with the Trump administration
hired two pro-Trump lawyers and eventually crossed paths with Lev Parnas and possibly Igor Fruman. Trump and his associates made it clear that Trump wanted dirt on Biden, Firtash got the former prosecutor general of Ukraine to [submit a signed statement](#) making false claims against Biden.

March 2019:

- Soviet-born businessmen Lev Parnas and Igor Fruman reportedly advocated on Firtash's behalf as they [lobbied](#) Naftogaz to replace its CEO with another individual [whom they hoped](#) would be amenable to "their plan to sell American natural gas to Ukraine."
 - During this effort, Parnas reportedly [indicated](#) to a Naftogaz official that then-U.S. Ambassador to Ukraine Marie Yovanovitch would be replaced—long before Trump took that action. Parnas and Fruman have not commented on these allegations.

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- When trying to [push this plan](#) to Naftogaz, Parnas and Fruman [reportedly](#) “invoked Firtash’s name,” saying that “Naftogaz should put aside financial disputes with Firtash, a decision that could provide a windfall of more than \$1 billion for the tycoon.” Firtash has [denied](#) any involvement in these negotiations.

June 2019:

- Firtash and Parnas allegedly [met](#) for the first time in June 2019 through a mutual friend.
- [According to The New York Times](#), during this meeting, Firtash was offered “help with his Justice Department problems” if he hired Joe diGenova and Victoria Toensing as his attorneys.
- Parnas’ lawyer [reportedly](#) claimed that Parnas met with Firtash “at Mr. Giuliani’s direction” “encouraged” Firtash to aid in the search for compromising dirt on Biden.
 - o [Firtash](#) “said he had no information about the Bidens and had not financed the search for it.” Giuliani [also claimed](#) he had not asked Parnas “to do anything with Firtash.”

July 2019:

- Austria [approved](#) the extradition of Firtash to the United States, but it was immediately on hold when Firtash’s legal team filed a motion to reopen the case.
- Firtash [hired](#) the pro-Trump legal team of diGenova and Toensing as his attorneys.
 - o DiGenova and Toensing are longtime Trump supporters who [regularly appear](#) in conservative media to defend him. Trump even wanted to hire the pair for himself in early 2018 but ultimately [decided](#) against the move because of various conflict of interest.
 - o The New York Times [reported](#) that before Firtash made the decision to hire diGenova and Toensing, there was “a brief discussion about Mr. Giuliani’s taking that role himself.” Instead, [Giuliani allegedly](#) tasked Parnas with convincing Firtash to hire diGenova and Toensing.
 - o Prior to hiring diGenova and Toensing, Firtash [had been working](#) with Lanny Davis, who represented Trump’s former attorney Michael Cohen. Cohen had fallen out of favor with Trump after he provided information to law enforcement and Congress regarding Trump’s misconduct.
 - o As Firtash’s lawyers, diGenova and Toensing [reportedly met](#) with U.S. Attorney General William Barr to discuss the case against Firtash. [According to The Washington Post](#), “Barr declined to intercede.”
- Initial reports indicated that diGenova and Toensing [reportedly hired](#) Parnas as a translator and alleged that Firtash [paid](#) the lawyers \$1 million—a strange move and a high price tag. Later reporting from The New York Times [indicated](#) that diGenova and Toensing’s initial contract with Firtash was a four-month, \$300,000-a-month contract, with Parnas receiving a share of \$200,000.
 - o DiGenova and Toensing [also represent](#) John Solomon, a former columnist at The New York Times who has published numerous pieces about the Ukraine scandal that support Trump and Giuliani’s conspiracy theories. Solomon even reportedly passed along an unpublished draft of an article on the Ukraine conspiracy theories to diGenova, Toensing, and Parnas before publishing—allegedly for “fact-checking” purposes. Solomon has [referred](#) to Firtash as “a major target of the Soros group” and has

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[claimed](#) that “key evidence that the DOJ used to indict Firtash on corruption charges in 2014 was falling apart.”

- According to Parnas’ lawyer, Parnas [allegedly](#) told Firtash that diGenova and Toensing “were interested in collecting information on the Bidens” and that he did so “per Giuliani’s instructions.”
- [Reportedly](#) around this time, “some of Firtash’s associates began to use his broad network of Ukraine contacts to get damaging information on Biden.”
- Both Parnas and Fruman [allegedly](#) “worked in an unspecified capacity for Firtash” before Parnas began his translator work. What’s more, a source was quoted as saying that Firtash was “[financing](#)” Fruman and Parnas’ activities, but it is unclear how much money Firtash paid, what these activities were, and when they occurred.
 - Firtash has [denied](#) any relationship with Parnas and Fruman and any contact with Giuliani. Giuliani has [denied](#) any relationship with Firtash. DiGenova and Toensing also [claimed](#) that Parnas has not been paid by Firtash.

September 2019:

- Firtash’s lawyers reportedly asked former Ukrainian Prosecutor General Viktor Shokin to submit a signed witness statement blaming Joe Biden for the Ukrainian government’s 2016 decision not to allow Firtash back in the country.
 - In this [statement](#), Shokin [repeated](#) his disproven claim that he had been fired in direct retribution for investigating Hunter Biden and the natural gas company [Burisma](#). Hunter Biden joined the board of Burisma in 2014 and has not been under investigation nor accused of any wrongdoing
 - Multiple Western allies, including the United States, [had](#) been [calling](#) for Ukraine to fire [Shokin](#) over concerns about corruption. Joe Biden, in his capacity as U.S. vice president, was one of the officials pushing Ukraine on this issue. Shokin was eventually removed from his post in March 2016.
- The witness statement proved to be directly for the political benefit of Trump. Giuliani received [access](#) to this statement and [later](#) [cited](#) it during a TV appearance, claiming it was proof of wrongdoing by Biden.

October 2019:

- Parnas and Fruman were indicted for charges that include conspiracy and campaign finance violations. They were arrested at Dulles International Airport near Washington, D.C., with only [way tickets](#) to Vienna, where Firtash had been fighting extradition. Giuliani had also [planned](#) a trip to Vienna at the same time, although he claimed that trip had nothing to do with Firtash.
 - The charges relate to [Parnas and Fruman allegedly](#) contributing \$325,000 to a pro-Trump super PAC “to obtain access to exclusive political events and gain influence with politicians.” Both men [have pleaded](#) not guilty to the charges. Giuliani has [denied](#) any connection to Firtash.
- Congressional investigators have [also](#) [raised](#) questions about whether Firtash is the source of the funds that Parnas and Fruman were accused of illegally donating. Firtash has [denied](#) the allegations.
 - A Ukrainian government source quoted in [Politico](#) [noted](#) that if Firtash had funded Parnas and Fruman’s donations, “money from the gas corruption scheme in Ukraine

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the U.S. political system.” [According](#) to The Washington Post, Firtash’s company has denied having “any special relationship” with the previous Ukrainian government.

- Reportedly, when Parnas and Fruman were [arrested](#), the federal prosecutors working on Firtash’s extradition case in Chicago “took note.”
 - o The prosecutors were [reportedly](#) aware of both Parnas and Fruman, and “suspect[ed] there might be a broader relationship among Firtash, Parnas and Fruman.”

Present: According to The Washington Post, Firtash’s [case](#) has [reportedly](#) been reopened in Austria, and his extradition is once again “on hold.”